

An Effecting Speech.
"A speech, a speech from Wilton!" cried the thoughtless fellows.
"He can't make a speech on cold water. I defy him," said one of their number.

"My friends," began Wilton.
"Hear, hear! he's really in for it now," cried a young man, whose flushed cheeks gave pitiful signs of his devotion to the bottle. "Wilton is on his feet."

The comrade they called Wilton was a young man, some twenty-three years of age. Upon his face, within his eyes, a settled melancholy rested. His manners were as grave as those of an old man. He was often called "Wilton the steady," on account of his quiet adherence to principle.

The head partner in the firm whose employ Wilton was gave a great party once a year, and it was to this gathering Wilton had been persuaded to come.

It, vain his companions tempted him with the wine that flowed freely. The "firm" considered themselves Christians, as, indeed, did the world generally. They gave largely to charities and to their church, where their seats were seldom empty. They did a great deal of good with their money; yet in placing this fiery temptation before young men, some of whom were as yet without fixed principles, they committed a gross and almost fatal error. Looking about him, Wilton saw already many faces flushed almost to inebriation; many eyes that moved with difficulty, and that dire unsteadiness that marks the incipient stage of drunkenness.

"My friends," he said, and then paused, as if to give greater emphasis to what might follow, "I am going to make a confession."

Some of the company smiled at this, but by far the greater number were awed at the sad yet earnest tones of his voice.

"Five years ago I had a brother, a bright, beautiful lad, in whom the hopes of a large family circle centered. He was called a genius, and he was one. Sensitive, gentle-hearted and generous to a fault, he also gave promise of extraordinary vigor of mind. One night several boys in the village where I was born resolved to have a frolic. The party was to be a secret one, if we could, provisions and wine. It came off with success. There was good cheer, there were bright and flowing liquors; we were all young and buoyant. My brother had never tasted wine. Whether it was a disinclination caused by natural dislike, or whether his intuitions led him to avoid it as dangerous to him, I do not know. I only know—and the recollection is at this moment burning in my brain—that we all thought if we could get Herbert drunk it would be fine fun. Friends could not have set themselves more ingeniously at work to compass this object than we did. I was foremost in the attempt. I will not excuse myself, nor in aught palliate my conduct. I knew he had a manuscript poem at home that had been pronounced remarkable by competent critics. I knew he could improvise almost without mental effort, and expected that under the stimulus of the fiery serpent—whose string I dread more than I dread death—his brain would be quickened, and we should be charmed, perhaps amazed, at the exhibition of his rare gift.

"At last we prevailed, but instead of quickening, the wine stupefied his faculties. A few glasses reduced him to a state of utter inebriety.

"The party broke up. We were all wild with drink and excitement; he also was humored and quite insensible. There was no rousing from the state of deathly sleep into which he had fallen. I dared not take him home that night, fearing that our frolic might be found out in consequence of the trouble we should have in getting him to his room. So we left him there, lying as comfortably as we could place him—his handsome face flushed and almost purple, his active brain for once completely stupefied.

"In the morning I was awakened by the sound of sobs. A white, scared face stood over me, a trembling, weak voice cried out: 'O Philip, your poor brother.'

"I sprang from my bed. My friends, I knew the truth soon enough. Herbert has recovered consciousness in the night sufficient to mislead him. He had fallen from the window, a height of twenty feet. He was still living. In vain my prayers, and tears, and anguish." His voice faltered.

"Young men, he is living yet, but an incurable idiot. Now will you ask me to take the accursed stuff? Yes, the curse of a living God rests upon it. It has burdened my life—it has ruined as noble an intellect as ever was ready to do battle with the faults and follies of the world. Do you still jeer and laugh because I will not be jovial? I tell you, if it was a living thing, I would strangle it—and there is nothing upon earth I hate with such dreadful hatred."

There was a deep silence. Not one in all the company seemed inclined to drink again.

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TILGHMAN ARNER, Assignee.
March 28, 1874.

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